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ABSTRACT

This action research project addressed the problem of declining parent involvement at a Midwestern, suburban elementary school. In order to document parent involvement issues at the site, parent, educator, and student surveys were administered. Surveys were analyzed for effectiveness of home-school communication, perceived barriers to and benefits of parent involvement as seen by teachers and parents, and student attitudes toward parent involvement. Based on findings, an intervention was developed to improve home-school relationships through better home-school communication, with an emphasis on school-initiated efforts toward: (1) open-ended communication; (2) meaningful student-adult activities; and (3) family-friendly classrooms. The intervention (tailored to each of the two participating classrooms--a K-1 mixed-age class and a fourth-grade class) specifically included formal opportunities for parent responses to student work and classroom activities, a newsletter, parent volunteer opportunities, record keeping of informal parent-teacher interactions, and a parent night. Parent and student comments, teacher anecdotal notes, and the number of parent/guardian volunteers indicated that teachers' efforts to reach out to parents were received positively and that parents, when provided with a variety of involvement opportunities that meet personal needs and schedules, will actively support student learning. Seventeen appendices include project materials. (Contains 24 references.) (EV)

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INCREASING PARENT INVOLVEMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE HOME/SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This report explores the development and maintenance of positive home-school relationships in order to insure continued student success. The targeted population consists of elementary school students attending a neighborhood school in a middle class suburban area of a Midwestern city. The issue of continued parent involvement within the school setting has recently been in question due to the changing population of the surrounding neighborhood community.

Analysis of probable cause data will reveal the development of negative perceptions that lead to parental and educator insecurities, the schools lack of clarity when communicating with parents, and parent/family time restraints as possible factors that contribute to the difficulty of the establishment and maintenance of a positive home-school relationship and the decrease in parent/adult volunteers within the school setting. The building principal reported that 46% of the students have been in attendance at this site for one year or less.

A review of solution strategies will include the development of two-way communication opportunities, the establishment of purposeful and meaningful student/adult activities to enhance student learning, and a commitment of the educational system to become more family friendly.

Post intervention data indicated that increasing parent involvement through effective home/school communication is paramount to student learning. Research supports the importance of this dynamic relationship between home and school.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 – PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT.....1

General Statement of the Issue.....1

Immediate Problem Context.....1

Community Setting.....3

National Context of the Problem.....5

CHAPTER 2 – ISSUE DOCUMENTATION.....8

Issue Evidence.....8

Probable Causes.....12

CHAPTER 3 – THE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES.....20

Literature Review.....20

Project Objectives and Processes.....28

Project Action Plan.....29

Analysis of Effectiveness.....32

CHAPTER 4 – PROJECT RESULTS.....33

Historical Description of the Intervention Strategies.....33

Presentation and Analysis of Results.....43

Conclusions and Recommendations.....50

REFERENCES.....52

APPENDICES.....54

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Issue

The staff at the targeted site has been challenged to confront the issue of increasing parent involvement in order to insure continued student development in a positive school climate. Evidence for the existence of the challenge includes the enrollment of many new students in all grade levels attending the site for the first time. The families of these students are also new members of the school community who may lack an awareness of building pride and possible school involvement opportunities for the educational growth of students.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research study takes place in a K-1 multiage classroom and a fourth grade class in an elementary school district located in a western suburb of a major city. This school is located in a self contained, unincorporated area and is somewhat isolated from the rest of the six district schools. It consists of four K-1 classes and two classes of each grade level second through fifth. Additionally, the school houses two learning disability classes in which the students are integrated or mainstreamed in all the grades. According to the 1997 School Report Card, the enrollment is 238 students, which is the smallest student population in the district. The average class size is approximately 19

students. The student population is comprised of 82.8% White, 8.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.6% Hispanic, and 4.2% Black. The socioeconomic status of the population is mainly middle-class with 6.3% low-income and 0.8% limited English. The attendance rate is 95.9% with student mobility at 6.3%. Due to recent demographic changes these statistics may not be a true reflection of the present student population.

The staff consists of 12 classroom teachers of grades kindergarten through fifth and three teachers of special education. All grades regularly participate in scheduled art, music, and physical education classes taught by certified personnel that are shared with other district schools. Certified support staff also shared with other district schools include a: social worker, speech/language specialist, basic skills teacher for short term interventions, Learning Resource Center coordinator, teacher of the gifted, school psychologist, nurse, ESL teacher, and band/orchestra director. Additionally, there are scheduled visits for specialists in occupational therapy, physical therapy, vision itinerant, and an Inclusion facilitator to support the educational programming for the 24 students having Individual Educational Plans. There are also five full time instructional assistants, five lunchroom supervisors, one adult crossing guard, and a part time health clerk. The office staff consists of one principal, one secretary, and a noontime secretary that is often employed to assist the professional needs of the principal and secretary. There is also a full time custodian and a part time custodian employed for evening hours.

The building has been in existence for 34 years. In order to accommodate the growth in student population and to expand both services and educational programs, the building has been renovated on four occasions. There are 13 classrooms, an all purpose room which is also utilized as a lunchroom, a learning resource center complete with

computer lab, a music room, and five special service rooms. A multi-age kindergarten and first grade program, incorporating a full-day kindergarten experience, was established in the fall of the 1996-97 school year. A student resource center was initiated to accommodate individual student needs of fourth and fifth grade students. Two fourth grade teachers, two fifth grade teachers, and one special education teacher monitor it. A one to one early intervention Reading Recovery/Discovery program provides support at the first grade level and is continued in the second grade as a small group Early Success experience. The all school "Dare to be Kind" initiative was developed by staff, students, and parents to promote responsible citizenship as members of our school community. It is supportive of the larger community coalition promoting Character Counts! Character Counts! is a national, nonpartisan, nonsectarian alliance of leading educational and human-service organizations dedicated to fortifying the character of America's youth with "Six Pillars of Character": trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. This school also has a community business link as a participant in the Junior Achievement program. Students participate yearly in an all school musical and also have opportunities to participate as student council representatives or officers, safety patrols, office helpers, computer assistants, and student leaders to assist kindergarten and first grade students.

Community Setting

The 1990 census reports that the median family income within the community is $50,848. The median per capita income is $18,281. Eighty-eight percent of the adults are high school graduates and 22.26% are college graduates. In the community work force, the census reflected a total of 21,895 employed individuals out of the total

population of 39,408. Thirty-eight and nine tenths percent are in technical, sales, and administrative support, 32.9% are in managerial-professional, 11.0% are production-repair, 9.4% are operators, fabricators and laborers, 7.7% are service occupations, 3.1% are unemployed, and 0.1% are in farming-forestry.

The community has a total of 15,848 housing units. Seventy-three point one percent were built between 1940 and 1979 with the median year built 1965. Of the available housing, 69.4% is owner occupied housing, 25.6% is renter occupied housing, and 5.0% is condominium housing.

The unincorporated area, which this school serves, consists of 846 single-family units built between 1960-1966. All houses are within walking distance of the school. Its own local park district also services this area.

According to the district 1997 School Report Card, the district employs 193 teachers with an average teaching experience of 14.7 years. The teacher's ethnic background is comprised of 99.2% White and 0.8% Asian/Pacific Islander. There are 11.9% male and 88.1% female teachers. Fifty-four percent of the teachers have a masters degree or above. The average teacher salary is $49,039 and the average administrator salary is $86, 444. The operating expenditure per pupil in 1995-96 was $6,400.

The majority of the students have met or exceeded the state goals on the Illinois Goal Assessment Program. Ninety-two percent of the third grade students met or exceeded the Reading goals, 100% met or exceeded the Math goals, and 97% met or exceeded the Writing goals. In fourth grade, 100% met or exceeded the Science goals and 97% met or exceeded the Social Sciences goals.

Historically, the surrounding neighborhood community is very supportive. Attendance at annual parent-teacher conferences is almost always 100%. The parents/guardians of 100% of the students at this site made at least one contact with the students' teachers during the 1996-97 school year. Community members, staff, and parents are active on the School Improvement committee and there is a very strong parent-teacher group. The parent volunteers are responsible for running the computer lab and for providing all of the help in the Learning Center. The parent-teacher group also organizes many fundraisers, assemblies, and special events throughout the year. This group also sponsors a school garden club. There is an established partnership with the local park district which includes a before and after school day care service. Photographers and reporters are often reporting the current happening in their local papers, so the paper supports the school and informs the community about special events.

In recent years, however, there has been a noticeable shift in the demographics of this site. The most current enrollment figures show that 22% of the students are new to the school and 42% have attended this school for one year or less.

National Context of the Problem

The challenge of parent/teacher communication is evident in current research and ongoing studies nationwide. As political organizations, educators, and government agencies debate the issue of parent involvement is school reform, one point of agreement is that parents and families need to be more involved in the education of our nation's children (School Reform and Parents, 1997). According to research studies conducted, parent involvement may be more effective than any other education reform measure (School Reform and Parents, 1997).

As communities discuss the issue of parent involvement in schools, a number of problems have become evident that could be possible obstacles to implementation of more effective parent/teacher communication. First, according to a study conducted in 1994 with Congressional staff members in Washington, there is concern regarding whether or not parents actually want to be involved (Wagner & Sconyers, 1996, p.3). Education as a priority in families is being questioned. Second, parental involvement in education has suffered due to changes in American family life (Bacon, 1990, p.2). According to Samuel Sava, as cited in Bacon (1990, p.2), stresses of single-parent families and working mothers give parents less time to devote to the education of their children. With more parents being unavailable during school hours due to job constraints, opportunities for parent/teacher communication have become more limited. More work is now involved by both parents and teachers to experience effective communication between home and school. Third, many teachers are afraid of parent participation in their classrooms. Parents are seen as a negative force to challenge them with censorship, protests, and law suites that have become recurring headlines in the media (Daniels, 1996). Finally, many parents are not aware of the importance of their participation in school activities and the impact it has on their children's education. Research supports the theory that when parents participate in school activities, they realize that they are important to their children's growth and academic achievement in school (Morrow & Young, 1996).

As our nation's schools continue to investigate school reform and improvement in public education, parent involvement has become an issue for which national standards have been developed to support student learning. These standards, developed by the

National PTA in cooperation with education and parent involvement professionals, stress the importance of parent involvement as a key to achieving the goal outlined by Goals 2000: "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (School Reform and Parents, 1997).

CHAPTER 2

ISSUE DOCUMENTATION

Issue Evidence

In order to document the issue of parent involvement at the targeted site, parent surveys, educator surveys, and student surveys were administered. Upon collection, all surveys were analyzed for effectiveness as communication tools, perceived barriers and benefits to parent involvement as seen by teachers and parents, and student attitudes toward parent involvement at the targeted sites. Forty-four parents of K-1 students of Class A and 18 parents of Class B; 10 educators; and 21 first grade students of Class A and 18 students of Class B were involved in the survey research.

Parent Survey

Parent surveys were administered at both sites. The survey (Appendix A) contained six open ended questions regarding level of parent participation in school activities, perceived benefits of that participation for both students and parents, and level of participation to support student learning outside of the classroom.

Of the 44 surveys sent home to parents of K-1 students in Class A, 34% of parents responded. Of the 18 surveys sent home to parents of students in Class B, 52% of parents responded. Of the parents responding in Class A, 93% volunteer in the school in some

capacity on a regular basis. Eighty-three percent of parents in Class B volunteer in the school on a regular basis. However, one third of the respondents in Class B also have students in Class A and volunteer more often for their Class A student.

A review of the data from the surveys, identified some common responses. In Class A, 70% of the respondents stated that their in-school involvement was for PTA sponsored activities. Thirty percent of volunteer activities in Class A were opportunities presented to parents by teachers such as one-on-one reading, readers' workshop, and center time. Class B respondents volunteered for PTA sponsored activities and one in-class volunteer opportunity was offered as part of a culminating activity in support of a parent/child/teacher learning experience.

Further review of the data reveals that parent's feel their children benefit from parent involvement in many ways. Parents at both sites stated that due to their involvement, students know that learning is important. This is communicated to the students through the modeling done by parent volunteers in the school. Parents also receive important information regarding curriculum and expectations by being able to network with teachers during the time they are in the school.

Respondents from both sites state that they feel they have a positive impact on all students in the building, thus creating a more positive learning atmosphere. Further analysis of the data reveals that all of the respondents feel that they support learning outside of the classroom. Activities cited as educational support are scouting, sports, educational field trips, academic projects at home, and homework assistance.

All parents who are involved in the learning process at both sites articulated definite benefits they receive from their involvement. They enjoy learning with the

students, being recognized for their contributions, watching the children develop academically and socially, and spending more "quality" time with their children. They also feel a stronger sense of community between family and school.

The data from the parent survey provides evidence of parent commitment to school involvement. However, there is also evidence of a low rate of communication, as proven by the high percentage of parents who did not respond to the survey- 66% in Class A and 48% in Class B. This low rate of response provides evidence of the need for more effective home/school communication.

Educator Survey

Educator surveys were distributed to classroom teachers and other certified staff providing student support within a classroom setting. The survey (Appendix B) consisted of five questions pertaining to the utilization, roles, and effectiveness of parent volunteers within an instructional setting.

Of the 10 educators surveyed, 100% viewed parent involvement within the educational setting as beneficial to student learning. Further analysis of the data indicated 3 positive replies and 7 negative replies to utilizing parental assistance within the present instructional setting. The 3 positive respondents were teachers of grades K-3. The 7 negative respondents were teachers of grades 4-5.

Of the positive replies, ways in which parental assistance is utilized included preparation of educational materials, student academic support within the classroom, and special classroom projects. A more thorough examination of the data revealed individual reading with students, small group center activities, and readers' workshop as ways parents support student learning in the classroom. It was also indicated that parents

provide assistance in the preparation of materials for special projects, such as cutting, stapling, or supplying an extra pair of hands for a baking activity.

Of the negative replies, further review of the data revealed some common responses. Approximately half of the negative respondents felt parent volunteers in the classroom were disruptive to the academic classroom routine and not necessary. Other common reasons given included the independent skill level of students, parental lack of teaching skills, confidentiality issues regarding student learning/classroom activities, and the structure of the instructional model. Of the 7 negative respondents, all stated the willingness to use parent volunteers under special circumstances. Suggested opportunities for parent involvement included field trips, library time, special all-school events, and PTA sponsored activities. Three of the negative respondents expressed a need for special training to be provided prior to parents working within the classroom.

The data from the "educator survey" provides evidence of educators' beliefs in the importance of parental involvement to student learning. However, the 7 negative respondents indicate a lack of willingness to utilize parental support within the classroom setting. The 3 positive respondents provide evidence of parental volunteer opportunities with specific responsibilities.

Student Survey

A total of 39 student surveys were administered, 21 first grade students in Class A and 18 fourth grade students in Class B. The survey (Appendix C) contained 3 questions regarding student feelings about parental involvement within the classroom. Eighty-seven percent of students responding liked having parent/adult volunteers in the classroom. Further review of the data reveals that 95% of students feel positively about

the possibility of a parent volunteering at school. Students in Class A articulated specific examples of ways parents help them to be better learners, all indicative and supportive of ways parent volunteers are utilized within the classroom setting. Parents assist young learners in the reading of chapter books and help with unknown words. Students stated that parents teach reading strategies and give clues to help students read successfully. Several students commented on parent support during center time and reader's workshop. Parents were seen to be good listeners, able to help students problem solve, and clarify directions. Students also explained it was fun to have parents in the classroom.

Students in Class B expressed more general ways parents support learning. Most comments pertained to parent support provided outside of the school day because there are not many formal in-school opportunities available to parents. Student remarks included parents help with homework, explanation of directions, and help to find errors. Students in Class B also stated parents could teach about jobs and about the past and how things used to be.

The data from the student survey provides evidence of student ability to articulate ways in which adult volunteers provide support for student learning. However, there is also evidence that student responses from Class A were more specific than those of students in Class B due to the number of parent volunteer opportunities. When volunteer opportunities are made available, parents participate.

Probable Causes

Effective home/school communication and its impact on parent involvement is a concern of educators, researchers, and parents. The research literature suggests three main barriers to effective communication, which may negatively impact parent

involvement in education. These barriers include: (a) development of negative perceptions by parents and educators, (b) schools' lack of clarity in communicating with parents, and (c) constraints due to basic family obligations. These are all seen as obstacles that negatively affect home/school communication.

Development of negative perceptions

Negative perceptions of parental involvement by parents and educators can reduce the opportunities for communication between home and school. Events can be interpreted and beliefs developed which can become obstacles to parents and educators relating in a positive way. Once these perceptions are formulated, they can "feed on themselves and build into a stronger sense of 'we' versus 'they'" (Robinson & Fine, 1994, p.3).

Research suggests that parents can form negative perceptions, thus preventing them from becoming involved in the schools their children attend. The reasons for the development of these negative perceptions appear to fall into four categories: 1) parental feelings of inadequacy, 2) past experiences parents have had with school, 3) parents putting little value on education, and 4) parents feeling that they are unwelcome and not respected by educators. Each of these reasons in itself can be enough to keep parents out of the school. Many times parents have all of these negative perceptions at once. This can put up a seemingly insurmountable barrier to communication and parent involvement.

Wofendale (1989) suggests that parental feelings of inadequacy may hinder their involvement (as cited in Hamilton & Osborne, 1994). Many parents feel helpless and intimidated by the expertise of educators. Unless parents feel that they have the skills

needed to be of help to the students and teacher, they may not be inclined to become actively involved. Cultural differences may also play a role in feelings of inadequacy for parents. They "may feel that their cultural strengths are not recognized" (Hamilton & Osborne, 1994, p.148). If parents feel intimidated and that they have nothing to offer, they may be resentful. Resentment could become a barrier to communication.

Research states that prior school experiences can have an impact on parent's willingness and ability to be involved and open to communication. Some may not have been successful as students themselves or may have had a traumatic experience in school (Dwyer & Hecht, 1992). Thus, their attitudes and negative perceptions have been carried with them into new interactions with their childrens' educational system. Hamilton & Osborne (1994) concluded that, for many parents, memories of negative school experiences carry over subconsciously to affect their current views of school. Still others may have had more recent negative experiences which can lead to a climate of mistrust and lack of communication (Thorp, 1997).

Hamilton & Osborne (1994) suggest that, in families where education is not valued, school is seen as an institution completely separate from home and any family involvement. Seen in this light, schools should be the sole educators of their children and parents, according to Dwyer & Hecht (1992), may perceive their role as completely removed from formal education. Some may even resent the time that school takes from their family life. This negative perception is an impediment to open communication and parent involvement.

Feeling unwelcome in the school is another reason for development of negative perceptions. Many parents feel that their presence is unwanted or unappreciated

(Hamilton & Osborne, 1994). In order to avoid these negative feelings, parents may avoid any contact with the school. This last reason for negative perceptions in parents may be founded in the negative perceptions expressed by educators.

The research literature cites a number of reasons for the development of negative perceptions of parent involvement by educators. The main ideas fall into three categories: 1) school climate, 2) teacher attitudes, and 3) knowledge of culture and family needs. A negative perception in any of these areas can have an immediate negative impact on parental involvement.

A school climate that is not friendly and inviting to families cannot be conducive to interaction and communication (Hamilton & Osborne, 1994). If staff behavior is such that they are seen as unfriendly, defensive, or even hostile, parents will choose not to be involved. The way in which the school staff communicates, not only with parents but also with each other, sets the tone for a school climate which is open and friendly or cold and authoritarian. Educators who hold negative perceptions about parent involvement communicate those perceptions through day-to-day interactions with colleagues and parents. These perceptions can spread through the entire staff in a school that has an unfriendly school climate.

Negative perceptions formulated by teachers can have a damaging effect on communication and parent involvement. Researchers state that many teachers feel that parents do not understand educational practices and that their presence in the classroom is an intrusion (Dwyer & Hecht, 1992 and Hamilton & Osborne, 1994). Carlson (1991) suggests that some teachers may feel a need to protect their autonomy, but others may truly "believe that the separation of home and school will wean the child from the self-

oriented atmosphere of the home to the other-oriented outside world" (p. 13). When teacher attitudes toward parent involvement are negative, opportunities for open communication are lessened and communication that does exist can be stilted and impersonal causing alienation and a sense of insincerity on both sides (Robinson & Fine, 1994).

Educators may also have developed negative perceptions of parental involvement based on a lack of knowledge of culture and changing family needs. As cultural diversity in our schools increases, teachers may make assumptions about behavior, values, and beliefs that are not indicative of a culture except the teacher's own. Lack of knowledge of diverse cultures can perpetuate negative perceptions teachers have toward parents of different cultures becoming involved. Lack of knowledge of the changing American family can have the same effect. Parents will not become involved if not given the opportunity by a teacher who understands and who can assist with their cultural and family needs.

Negative perceptions can be developed and perpetuated by parents and educators in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons. These perceptions can be conscious or unconscious, but will be communicated between parents and educators either way. This is not the type of communication that leads to positive interactions and increased parent involvement.

School's Lack of Clarity in Communicating with Parents

A lack of clarity in written and verbal communication can be another barrier to effective home/school communication. Dwyer & Hecht (1992) point out that it is the school's job to reach out to parents in order to strengthen the partnership between school

and home. A strong partnership, based on clear communication, provides a foundation for parents and educators to begin working together. Parents need a clear understanding of expectations for themselves and their children in order for them to achieve a level of comfort which will allow them to be actively involved in the education process.

Written communication to parents can often be a source of misunderstanding, confusion, and frustration. The wording of written communication, if not clear and concise, may alienate parents and cause them to feel separated from the school, especially if they cannot read or speak English (Hamilton & Osborne, 1994). Researchers have observed that many teachers use educational jargon which parents cannot understand (Dwyer & Hecht, 1992 and Robinson & Fine, 1994). Some parents will be too embarrassed to ask teachers for clarification. Thus, the communication has not been successful, leaving parents and teachers without a clear understanding of procedures, expectations, or roles.

Written communication in student assignments can also be a source of confusion and frustration for parents who want to be involved at home. If directions are not clear and understandable, parents may feel inadequate and, consequently, be unable to help check homework or work with their children on projects. For many parents involvement at home is the only way that they can be partners with the school.

Verbal communication, whether over the phone or face-to-face, must also be clear, concise, and free of educational jargon for the same reasons. Parents must feel that, whenever they speak with teachers, they will have a clear understanding of what is being said. Robinson & Fine (1994) suggest that "the challenge for teachers is to be

sensitive to how to communicate meaningfully" and to clarify any "ambiguities of perceptions and expectations" between parents and teachers (p.4).

Clear, effective communication between home and school can enhance existing parent involvement. Furthermore, it can increase opportunities to create home/school partnerships and allow parents to be involved in an effective way with their children's education.

Constraints due to basic family obligations

Constraints due to basic family obligations can be another barrier to effective home/school communication. Samuel Save, the executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, states that parental involvement in education has been victim of changes in American family life (as cited in Bacon, 1990). Parents have less time and energy to be involved in the education of their children. Increased divorce rate, the ratio of children living in single-parent homes, and the proportion of two working-parent families are all contributing factors to the changes in the structure of the American family.

Work schedules and family structures are important factors that effect parent involvement in school-related activities. Brown (1989) states "for many parents, a major impediment to becoming involved is the lack of time" (p.3). Personal circumstances may limit the parent/adult involvement opportunities for school-related experiences. It is difficult for working parents to attend school events and varied work schedules impact parent's availability to participate in school-related functions. Parents may choose to spend available free time with family members rather than attend a school meeting or

event. Single parent families may be presented with issues of child-care and financial restraints.

Families of diverse backgrounds and cultures may have particular beliefs or traditions that don't necessarily support parent/adult involvement in student learning. Jordan, Reyes-Blanes, & Peel (1998) point out the importance of the inter- and intracultural variations in each family system. Variations may result in differences of language proficiency, religious beliefs, and level of education. It is important for the educational system to be sensitive and responsive to the diverse cultural needs of families. The structure of today's American family presents educators with a unique challenge in the continued attempt to promote effective home/school communication.

Effective home/school communication is foundational in the promotion of parent/adult involvement in student learning. The experts suggest three important components that negatively impact parent involvement in education. The development of negative perceptions by parents and educators, school's lack of clarity in communicating with parents, and constraints due to basic family obligations are all seen as major factors that negatively influence home/school communication. In the next chapter intervention strategies will be presented to address these probable causes effecting the targeted Kindergarten/first and fourth grade classes.

CHAPTER 3

THE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Literature Review

There is a considerable amount of research available that addresses the importance of parent involvement in student development and achievement. Research states consistently that there is a need for a strong partnership between home and school and that it is the school's responsibility to take the lead in getting parents involved (Carlson, 1991; Dwyer & Hecht, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Dwyer and Hecht (1992) point out:

> Regardless of the reason (or reasons) for low parental involvement one point remains consistent and clear throughout the literature. The first steps in any parent involvement program must involve the school reaching out to the parent. The exact ways and means of the involvement must vary according to the situation of the school and the parents, but all programs must begin with the simple act of communicating. (p. 15)

A growing number of researchers agree that, in order for students to achieve success, there must be teamwork and collaboration on the part of parents and teachers. There needs to be mutual support for their respective roles (Carlson, 1991; Rosenthal &

Sawyers, 1996). Epstein of Johns Hopkins University states in a 1989 report that "Research conducted for nearly a quarter century has shown convincingly that parent involvement is important for children's learning, attitudes about school, and aspirations" (Carlson, 1991).

The role of parents as part of the educational team has been a slow-moving process, not coming to the forefront until the school reform decade of the 1980's (Carlson, 1991). The Head Start program, begun in 1964, was an innovative program in which parents were mandated to become involved in their children's learning process. The success of this program and the publication of (Halies) A Nation at Risk in 1983 prompted an ongoing surge of educatiqnal research into strategies to effectively involve parents in the school community (Carlson, 1991).

People look at parent involvement in different ways. Jennings (as cited in Wanat, 1997) expressed, "The term parental involvement may mean different things to different people" (p.434). A study by Wanat in 1993 suggests that parents may look at their involvement as a part of their child's school day, but also see home involvement with school activities as merely an extension of the school day. Many see very little difference between the two. However, Epstein (1995) clearly delineates six types of parent involvement: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating with community. Casanova (1996) further reports that Epstein's model does not include types of parental involvement resulting in negative consequences. Lerner (as cited in Casanova, 1996) states "Parent involvement—like anything else in life—is a mixed blessing. If you take the positive aspects, you must be ready for negatives as well" (p. 31).

Research suggested many strategies for improving parent involvement through the use of communication tools. Communication can begin to create a partnership between home and school with both parents and teacher being collaborative advocates for children (Swick, 1992). Home/school communication benefits the child, parents, school, and community as a whole in many ways. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) concluded that parent-staff relationships become stronger and more positive and parents get feedback regarding their children's progress. This increased positive interaction reflects on the school as a caring, healthy environment for the members of the community.

Current research supports effective strategies for increasing parent involvement through communication. These strategies include, but are not limited to: (a)formal and informal home/school communication, (b) engaging in parent/child/teacher learning activities, and (c) in-school parent/adult volunteers. Each of these strategies can be viewed as an opportunity for communication between home and school.

Formal and Informal Home/School Communication

Formal communication is one form of two-way communication that serves a number of purposes. It acts as a vehicle to inform parents of student progress, keeps parents aware of what is transpiring in the classroom, allows teachers to gain useful knowledge about students and their families, and provides parents with an opportunity to share concerns or questions they may have regarding any aspect of their children's educational experience.

The parent-teacher conference is a formal communication strategy which, for many families, may be the sole contact between home and school (Rosenthal & Sawyers, 1996). A number of researchers acknowledge that formal parent-teacher conferences

must be held at varying times to accommodate working parents (Rosenthal & Sawyers, 1996; Carlson, 1991). This formal two-way communication allows teachers to convey vital information regarding a child's academic and social progress. It is also an opportunity for teachers to learn about family backgrounds and to build on the strengths of those backgrounds within the classroom (Morrow & Young, 1996). Thorp (1997) states "beliefs that support family participation are those that acknowledge that each family brings knowledge and experience that can contribute to the school environment and that can enrich professional understanding of their children" (p. 265). Parents, teachers, and students benefit from increased knowledge of each other. The formal conference is one way to exchange that knowledge.

Parent surveys can also serve as a formal way for teachers to gain valuable information from parents regarding their needs and concerns. The survey can be used as a vehicle for gathering information regarding issues that directly affect a child's learning. It can also serve as an evaluative tool regarding units of study or classroom activities. This can assist teachers in evaluating the effectiveness of programs and teaching styles. Foster-Harrison & Peel (1995) recommend that surveys be used to keep needs updated to make sure classroom strategies are relevant and practical. Surveys, by the types of questions asked, also inform parents about the school concerns.

Parents need and desire specific information regarding school/classroom events, academic expectations, and student progress. Other types of formal communication tools that serve as a foundation for shared information between school and home include newsletters, progress reports, open house or curriculum nights, and student work samples sent home with the inclusion of a parent response sheet. Educators must respect family

lifestyle, structure, and cultural diversity in the development of effective communication vehicles. In 1989 Brown stated that the aim is to, "....inform parents about what their children are learning, and help parents to create a supportive environment for children's learning at home" (p.1).

Informal communication can occur between parent and teacher in a variety of ways and in a variety of environments. Lindle (1989) states, "For the most part, parents seem to prefer informal relationships with the children's teachers" (as cited in Jesse, 1997, p.23). Parents like regular informal phone calls and appreciate personal attention given to them that present an opportunity for sharing perspectives about their child's education and growth. Parent volunteers in the classroom or in other areas of the school can often communicate concerns or questions to the teacher while students are working independently on a project. They may also stop in before or after school or at lunchtime. A family-friendly environment is essential for parents to feel comfortable enough to approach the teacher or other staff members for information or to give input regarding issues concerning them.

In the book Beyond the Bake Sale Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms discuss principles of parent participatory programs. Included in these principles are two, which directly relate to these informal communication opportunities. The first of these principles is that "every aspect of the school climate should be 'open, helpful, and friendly' " (as cited in Carlson, 1991, p.20). By displaying an atmosphere with these qualities, parents may feel inclined to be more open to sharing on a more casual basis. The second principle is "communications with parents should be frequent, clear, and two-way" (as cited in Carlson, 1991, p.20). Informal, casual discussions open up

opportunities for more frequent communication in which teachers and parents can strengthen the sense of partnership between home and school.

Engaging in parent/child/teacher learning activities

Research suggests that engaging parents and children in shared learning activities at home can benefit parent, child, and teacher. This shared learning experience can help foster and strengthen the partnership between home and school. With parents as facilitators, a well-planned activity can allow for frequent communication, collaboration, and evaluation of the process and of student progress (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Swick, 1991 as cited in Swick, 1992).

Shared learning activities not only extend curriculum outside of the classroom, but also provide opportunities for parents to be a part of the learning process in a more direct way. Epstein, head of the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools at The Johns Hopkins University has established 5 methods by which parents can become involved in their children's education (Carlson, 1991). She states:

> The fourth method is involvement in learning activities at home, including guidance or actual assignments from teachers to parents and children designed to include parents in their children's work at home. The schools can help in this effort by providing information and guidance to parents for the most effective methods to carry out this information (Carlson, 1991, p.19).

Epstein disagrees with other researchers who feel that such homework projects intrude both on the parents' time and on the methods they choose for interacting with their students (Carlson, 1991). Teachers and parents can plan activities conducive to student learning while taking into consideration the lifestyle of the family. Open, two-way

communication between home and school can help to create the most relevant activities to most benefit students, parents, and teachers.

When well planned, there are many benefits to shared learning experiences. First, shared learning experiences help to counter low motivation in students. Carlson (1991) states that "when parents support the importance of school, the teachers' task of motivating students becomes easier" (p.10). Parents' participating in activities with their children helps to convey the message that education is a high priority.

Second, collaborative learning activities can help to facilitate a learning environment at home. Sigel (as cited in Carlson, 1991), an expert in child development at Educational Testing Services, has suggested that "the role of the parents is to facilitate the learning environment at home, and to be a facilitator in setting certain constraints, and discipline in the follow-through process" (p.20). A shared learning activity can be a vehicle for providing the structure needed to create a learning environment.

Third, shared family experiences can provide opportunities for parents who cannot be in the school during school hours to be active participants in the education process. According to Peterson (1989) "...many parents who will not volunteer in the schools or are unavailable during school hours will take time to help their children learn, particularly if they can do so at home" (p.14). This can be a valuable way for parents to help their children to increase skills while, at the same time, gain a better understanding of what their children are learning on a day-to-day basis.

Lastly, shared learning activities can increase opportunities for strengthening the relationship between parent and child through shared learning and discussion during activities. In research conducted by Morrow & Young (1996), it was concluded through

parent and child interviews that both parents and children benefited from a family literacy program. The children saw the parents as models of how to help others; they felt more loved; and they liked having someone to help them. The parents learned how to help their children and that they could; they enjoyed learning from each other and sharing ideas; and they liked spending quality time together (Morrow & Young, 1996).

Shared learning activities at home provide parents with many opportunities to be directly involved in their children's education and to more closely monitor student progress. They contribute to the foundation of student support and motivation. Shared learning activities also provide teachers with another vehicle for two-way communication, thus strengthening the partnership between home and school.

Parent Involvement

The National PTA developed the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs to help schools, communities, and parenting groups implement effective parent involvement programs with the aim of improving students' academic performance (Sullivan, 1998). Parent/adult volunteers within the educational setting provide a support system for growth of all learners.

Parent involvement in a "school sense" benefits student, parent, and teacher. Adult volunteers engaged in effective in-school educational activities demonstrate a commitment to learning, provide increased opportunities for student/adult communication, and assist students in the development of a sense of security in learning and its importance. Parents/adults that volunteer in the classroom setting increase their understanding of how a classroom functions, improve personal communication skills with children, utilize their own expertise to assist student learners, serve as role models

for students, support the learning program, and develop a better understanding of what teachers and students do.

Teacher benefits of in-school parent volunteers include: recognition of positive communication and teaching skills by parents, support provided for the implementation of the educational program, valuable input on student learning from another pair of eyes, and improved parent understanding of classroom life. When in-class parent/adult volunteer activities parallel classroom teaching methods, it helps parents to understand what teachers are doing, and as a result, generates broad family support (Daniels, 1996). There is a dynamic relationship developed between home and school.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of increased emphasis on home/school communication during the period of January 1999 to June 1999, the targeted classroom teachers will emphasize the development and maintenance of positive home/school relationships in order to insure continued student success. Significant consideration will be given to school initiated efforts that advocate open-ended communication opportunities to keep parents, teachers and students regularly informed.

In order to accomplish the project objectives the following processes are necessary:

1. Two-way communication opportunities will be developed to improve home/school relations.
2. The establishment of purposeful and meaningful student/adult activities will enhance student learning.

3. The classroom educational system will make a commitment to become more family friendly to promote parent/guardian involvement.

Project Action Plan

In January, both classroom researchers will distribute a teacher survey and a parent survey. The teacher survey will be given to certified building personnel to show existing levels of parent involvement utilized by staff within the educational setting. The parent survey will be distributed to all families in each researcher's homeroom to determine existing levels of parent involvement on and off the educational site. Throughout the intervention period both researchers will implement explicit strategies that cultivate the stated processes of parent/guardian involvement, two-way communication opportunities, and meaningful student/adult activities. Strategy frequency will be determined by the purpose for the intervention with specific consideration given to the needs of teachers, parents, and students.

Action Plan Class A

1. A folder of student work and school notices will be sent home to parents/guardians each Friday. Included in this folder will be a parent response form to provide opportunity for parent signature and comments. A tally of the number and analysis of parent comments will serve as evidence of two-way communication opportunities.
2. A K-1 Cluster newsletter will be distributed every two to three weeks in the Friday folder to inform parents/guardians of general skills, strategies, units of study, and other pertinent information regarding classroom life. Informational items pertaining to building activities, day to day routines, or announcements will be included. This

newsletter will be posted on the district homepage and also on the Family Education Network (FEN).

3. A K-1 Curriculum Night will be presented to parents of K-1 Cluster students. Prior to the Curriculum Night a Parent Community/Cluster survey will be distributed to all Cluster families. Results will serve as the foundation and focus of the K-1 Curriculum Night.
4. Informal parent/teacher interaction will exist as on-going opportunities for parents and teacher to communicate. Informal parent/teacher interactions are low-key and often quite informative. A record of the number of informal parent/teacher interactions will serve as evidence of positive home/school communication opportunities.
5. Student and parent/guardian will complete monthly self-selected homework activities. Student/adult response log will be completed to support the student/adult self-reflection process. Analysis of comments will provide necessary feedback to assist in the determination of the appropriateness of future homework activities.
6. Parent volunteers will be surveyed for availability and preference, then scheduled during the school day in support of the existing educational program within the classroom setting. Appropriate opportunities for meaningful student/adult learning activities will be one-on-one parent/student reading, centers, and readers' workshop. Anecdotal notes, student checklist, and a tally of the number of parent volunteers will help to determine the effectiveness of these student/adult activities and will provide evidence of frequency and purpose of student/adult involvement and interactions.

Action Plan Class B

1. A folder of student work and school notices will be sent home weekly on Tuesday to parents/guardians. Included in this folder will be a parent response form to provide opportunity for parent signature and comments. The classroom teacher will check signed forms on Wednesday. A tally of the number and analysis of parent comments will serve as evidence of two-way communication opportunities.
2. Student progress and behavior mini-reports will be sent home with students at three-week intervals to keep parents/guardians informed of student academic and behavioral progress.
3. A mid-year parent survey sent home with students in February after the second report card will provide parents opportunity to reflect on the school year and express concerns and share comments. A tally of returned surveys and analysis of comments will serve as evidence of two-way communication.
4. Informal parent/teacher interaction will exist as on-going opportunities for parents and teacher to communicate often as a result of the parent bringing the child to school or stopping in at the end of the day. Parent/teacher interactions are low-key, informal, and often quite informative. A record of the number of informal parent/teacher interactions will serve as evidence of home/school communication opportunities.
5. Student/adult reading and writing activities, based upon an appropriate grade level novel, will be sent home with students, along with a choice of activities to be completed with a parent or guardian. A reading response log for student reflections will be included. A culminating activity including all students and parents will be

planned to celebrate the success of the experience. Reflective parent and student surveys will be sent home upon completion of the activities to determine the effectiveness of this student/adult activity and to provide a vehicle for two-way communication.

Analysis of Effectiveness

In order to determine the effects of the interventions after a four month period, all survey results will be compiled. Parent and student comments and reflections will be analyzed and the number of parent/guardian volunteers will be examined. In addition, teacher anecdotal notes will be reviewed. Analysis of the effectiveness of interventions will be based upon types of parent/student comments, teacher anecdotal notes, and the number of on site parent/guardian volunteers in support of the educational program.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention Strategies

The objective of this project was to increase emphasis on the development and maintenance of positive home/school relationships that support and promote parent/adult involvement in student learning. Implementing a variety of interventions providing opportunity for home/school communication was meant to effect the desired outcomes.

Formal and Informal Home/School Communication

Formal and informal home/school communication tools were created to present opportunities for parent involvement in student learning. These tools included weekly folders of student work, development of a class newsletter and web site, parent survey and results presented on a curriculum night, completion of student progress and behavior mini-reports, and distribution of a mid-year parent survey. The teacher researchers of both classes also attempted to engage parents/adults in informal conversational opportunities.

Class A

Formal and informal home/school communication tools implemented in Class A included weekly folders of student work, the creation of a class newsletter and web site,

and parent satisfaction survey results presented on a curriculum night. These tools provided opportunities for communication between home and school.

Folders of completed student work were sent home weekly. The inclusion of a parent/teacher comment form (Appendix E) provided the occasion for parents and teacher to communicate in writing any remarks regarding student development or need. Teacher comments were dated and parent signatures were required. The folders were sent home each Friday and students were required to return the folder to the teacher the next school day. The Friday folder also served as a vehicle for the distribution of written communication announcements from organizations supportive of the educational process, such as the PTA and other local community groups.

A K-1 class newsletter (Appendix F) was created as an informational tool and distributed every two to three weeks via the student Friday folder. The class newsletter included topics of interest such as current or future units of study, special projects, favorite book titles, important dates, and particular events such as field trips or in-school assemblies. This newsletter was posted on the district homepage and also on the Family Education Network (FEN). Each issue of the newsletter retained the same format to assist with familiarity and also included the web site address.

A parent opinion survey was distributed to all families of the K-1 multiage program (Appendix G). An explanation of the purpose for the survey and directions for the completion of the survey were also included. The survey consisted of a series of 10 general statements to be ranked on a scale of 1-5 with space for possible short answer comments. A response of 1 indicated a feeling of "strongly disagree" and a response of 5 indicated a feeling of "strongly agree." In addition, five specific questions requiring an

answer in written form were included. Parents were given license to reflect and comment on personal attitudes pertaining to the performance of the K-1 Cluster as previously shared through informational meetings and pertinent readings on the concept of multi-age education, benefits for student learning, student interest level of thematic units presented, and suggestions for future improvement opportunities. Information garnered via the survey provided the foundation and focus for a K-1 Parent Curriculum Night.

An invitation to the K-1 Curriculum Night with a description of the evening's agenda was distributed to each family. Topics for discussion on the invitation were presented in question form and included information about state standards and their relationship to district learning objectives, the development of thematic units of study, the rationale for center work, the developmental spelling process, and parent comments compiled from the parent survey. The K-1 Curriculum Night was scheduled in the evening in the multi-purpose room and was intended to be an adult-only informational meeting.

Informal communication opportunities in Class A were created in multiple ways. Effort was made to interact with parents prior to the school day and upon the completion of the school day. Parents were readily available on the school grounds while waiting for the children to enter the building and after school waiting for dismissal. Parent/adult volunteers supportive of the educational program within the classroom or elsewhere in the school provided further opportunity for informal communication to occur. The early arrival of scheduled classroom volunteers provided opportunity for the engagement of informal discussions. In addition, adult volunteers assisted in the library and computer lab on a regularly scheduled basis and participated in general conversational experiences.

Lastly, positive informal phone conversations enabled two-way communication opportunities for teacher and parents. These calls were initiated by either teacher or parents dependent upon individual need and purpose.

Class B

Folders containing students' graded work for the preceding week, along with a parent signature and response form (Appendix H), were sent home with the students of Class B on a weekly basis. This communication tool allowed parents to view student progress and communicate with the teacher. Students brought the folders with signed response forms back to class on the next school day. The teacher checked each folder for parent signature, stamped each signature area to verify to parents its return, and took notes on any parent comments or requests. All folders were sent home on Tuesdays and returned on Wednesdays unless there was a school holiday, in which case folders were sent home on the next school day after the holiday. This weekly procedure took place form the onset of the researcher's intervention in January until the end of the school year in June.

A second formal communication tool was sent home at three-week intervals to inform parents/guardians of student behavior and academic progress in Class B. A sample of this student behavior/progress mini-report can be seen in Appendix I. The teacher checked the appropriate box for student behavior (poor, fair, or good) and provided explanatory comments where necessary. A space for parent comments was also provided. Checking the appropriate box (poor, fair, or good) provided academic progress for each curriculum area. Also included in each box was the student's grade average and letter grade at the time the report was sent home. A space for parent comments was also

included in this portion of the mini-report. The teacher signed each report and sent these reports home in the student Tuesday folders. Parents/guardians were requested to sign and return these reports to the teacher. Behavior/progress mini-reports were sent home three times during the intervention process. Formal report cards negated the use of this tool twice during the action research project.

A third formal communication tool was implemented in Class B requesting parents and students to reflect on the school year so far. A copy of this mid-year survey can be seen in Appendix J. The survey was sent home with the students, in an envelope, in the Tuesday folder. Surveys were anonymous to ease the comfort level of participants to answer freely and honestly. The survey included five question regarding student participation in fourth grade and one area to share any other comments or concerns not covered by the questions.

Parents were asked to reflect and comment on challenges for their child, activities in the classroom, homework amounts, and effectiveness of communication tools utilized by the teacher. A return envelope was provided to protect anonymity, and parents either sent the survey back with the student or brought the survey to the school office for placement in the teacher's mailbox. The purpose of the mid-year survey was to get parent/child feedback in order to assist the teacher in planning for a successful continuation of educational experiences for the students in Class B.

Informal communication for Class B was in the form of unplanned conversational opportunities presented to the teacher and parents/adults. These opportunities presented themselves when parents were in the school for PTA or other activities, when parents stopped in at the beginning or end of the school day to drop off or pick up students, when

parents came in to pick up homework for an absent child, or when phone calls were made from parent to teacher or teacher to parent. Some parents/adults also initiated conversations during community events outside of the regular school day.

Engaging in parent/child/teacher learning activities

Shared learning activities were constructed for possible parent/child/teacher communication opportunities in the student learning process. These activities were supportive of the educational process within the classroom, provided opportunities for parents to be directly engaged in student learning, and extended the curriculum outside of the classroom. Concepts and strategies were initially introduced in the classroom with opportunity for parents to support further student growth at home. Parents and students completed specific homework tasks collaboratively and each responded personally in written form about the shared experience.

Class A

The beginning of each month a calendar of parent/child homework activities and response journal sheet (Appendix K) was distributed to each family. Directions stated to select at least three homework activities per week to be completed together and document the experience by the completion of the response journal sheet. Students were to respond to three statements pertaining to personal preference of activity, an activity that required help to complete, and a statement of explanation for something that was learned. Parent response statements also included a statement of explanation for something that was learned. In addition, parents were requested to state the activity they most enjoyed completing with their child and which activity necessitated parental support to be completed. The activities were educationally based, easily interpreted, and designed to

be fun. The selection of monthly activities also provided for choice of topics and variety of learning modalities. *The calendar and the response journal were to be turned in by the* last day of the month. Students then had an opportunity to share two favorite activities with the class.

Class B

A parent/child/teacher reading and writing activity was implemented in Class B for a three-week period. The activity focused on the reading of a grade appropriate novel at home with an adult reading partner. Samples of activity sheets and parent/teacher communication tools can be seen in Appendix L. Each student received a copy of the novel and a reading log in which to record chapter summaries, vocabulary, and reflections. A letter of explanation was sent home to parents along with a tear-off signature portion for parents to acknowledge awareness of the upcoming activity.

The teacher and students read the first chapter of the novel together at school. The teacher modeled the process for discovery of vocabulary words and writing a summary of the chapter. After reading and writing vocabulary words and summary, each student wrote his or her own reflection for chapter one, focusing on his or her feelings after reading. Reading logs and novels were sent home with the students each night, with instructions to bring them back the next day for classroom activities.

Parent/adult expectations for involvement were to listen to the child read one chapter (7-10 pages) aloud per night and assist with the choosing of two vocabulary words for activities the next day in class. Summaries and reflections were the responsibility of the student, with reading partners encouraged to engage in discussion of the chapters with each child. Parents/adults were also asked to initial each log entry.

Reading logs also contained a section for parent reflection during reading, but this portion was strictly voluntary.

Classroom activities extended the reading and writing experiences for students through the implementation of class discussions, vocabulary activities, and skill practice. Students were also given the opportunity to share personal written reflections if desired. Upon completion of the novel reading, students were instructed to choose two projects to complete alone or with the adult partner.

At the close of the home/school literature experience, parents and students were asked to reflect and respond to a survey designed to elicit feedback on the value of this experience as an appropriate teaching tool and as a way of communicating student progress in reading. A parent letter and anonymous parent reflection survey were sent home with the students in the Tuesday folder. An envelope was provided in which to return the survey. Surveys were brought back by students and analyzed by the teacher. Student reflection surveys were filled in at school and returned to the teacher.

In-school parent/adult volunteers

The design of in-school volunteer opportunities, supportive of the instructional program, provided appropriate and meaningful experiences for parents/adults to deepen their knowledge and understanding of student learning. These parent involvement experiences were designed to benefit students, parents, and teachers.

Class A

The teacher researcher of Class A designed three on-going parent/adult volunteer initiatives supportive of student learning. The initiatives provided opportunities for student academic understanding and skills to be strengthened, encouraged the

development of student social skills, and allowed for the reinforcement of independent work skills in a supportive non-threatening model. One of the distinct and essential roles designed for meaningful adult/student interaction involved opportunities for the volunteer to provide individual student support in a one-on-one reading relationship. Students self selected a book to read and practiced with the volunteer. Volunteers were directed to use a list of possible questions to ask and suggested comments to make (Appendix M) in support of the young readers' growth. Students took the book home to read to family members and then returned it to school. This activity was scheduled for the morning and operated alongside other scheduled student/teacher instructional responsibilities.

Two additional in-class volunteer experiences were scheduled for specific afternoon time periods. Readers' workshop was developed and structured as an opportunity for students to practice independent reading strategies using self-selected books that were appropriately leveled for developmental reading stages. Students conferenced with the teacher about the selection, reread the book to three fellow students, and then expanded the reading experience through an extended activity. Volunteers provided an adult model, other than the teacher, to listen to the students read or to assist them with any necessary support during the independent activity process. The teacher documented student involvement in anecdotal form and students were responsible for keeping work organized in a personalized folder.

Center activities designed to provide students with the opportunity to practice independent work skills in a small group setting was the final offering that was dependent upon parent volunteer participation. Center experiences were generally coordinated with a thematic unit of study and were reflective of appropriate skills and/or strategies

previously introduced in class. Center activities challenged students to think creatively and critically, problem solve for appropriate solutions, and to apply previous knowledge to new learning experiences. Volunteer responsibilities included the facilitation of student work in the small group setting during the independent work time. At the conclusion of center time students processed the experience together in a large group setting with each student having a chance to share something he or she learned.

Parent volunteers were surveyed (Appendix N) for day/time availability and preference of activity. The teacher researcher constructed a schedule for a three-month period of time for parent volunteers based upon information presented in the adult volunteer letter. As shown in Appendix O, all adult/parent volunteers received a complete calendar of scheduled times and specific activities. Parents willing to support student learning in a meaningful way, but unable to participate during the school day, were often enlisted to do material preparation tasks that supported student activity within the classroom.

Each parent/adult volunteer received an informational letter with a detailed description of each activity and explanation of parent responsibilities (Appendix P). The teacher gave guidance and further direction for particular activities when the volunteer arrived at the classroom. The process for the one-on-one reading and readers' workshop remained consistent throughout the period of intervention, while the center activities changed every two weeks. This required verbal directions to be shared by the teacher with volunteers on a daily basis.

Class B

The teacher researcher in Class B provided an opportunity for parent/adult volunteers in the classroom as part of the culminating activity for the home/school literature experience previously described. The teacher and students planned a luncheon that needed adult assistance in preparation, delivery, and set-up of food for all that could attend. The luncheon was planned as a celebration of the family reading experience and was held in the classroom during the regular school lunch period.

Prior to the luncheon an invitation was sent home with students to each family with a response sheet requesting who would attend. Also included was a request for food donations or assistance with cooking and delivery of food. A copy of the invitation and response form is provided in Appendix Q.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Data collected as a result of parent feedback from surveys and other communication opportunities were analyzed in narrative form to determine patterns and trends of responses. Teacher researchers examined these patterns and trends to assist in the understanding and benefits of parent involvement opportunities in the support of student learning.

Formal and Informal Home/School Communication

Weekly parent/teacher comment forms, parent survey responses, and teacher researcher anecdotal records from informal communication opportunities provided data in narrative form to be analyzed for the effectiveness of these tools as two-way communication vehicles in Class A and Class B.

Parent comments varied in frequency, topic, and length. The frequency and consistent involvement of parents participating in writing comments is indicative of the effectiveness of this tool as a two-way communication opportunity. Parent responses varied and were often a reflection of the weekly comments written by the teacher. During the course of the intervention, 44 out of 44 parents of K-1 students in Class A provided information in written form at least one time on the weekly parent/teacher comment forms contained in the Friday folders. Fourteen out of 22 parents of students in Class B used the weekly parent signature/response forms as an opportunity for formal two-way communication. These comments serve as evidence of continual two-way communication opportunities that were presented by the teacher researchers to the parents/guardians of the students in both classes. This intervention tool appeared to serve as a valuable link between home and school on a consistent, weekly basis. Parents brought concerns to the attention of the teacher immediately upon receipt of graded student work. This allowed the teacher to respond with a follow-up note or phone call in a timely manner. The researchers also determined that this tool, when combined with student work, served as a way for parents to be kept informed of what concepts were being taught in the classroom and where active parent involvement was needed for student success.

The parent survey sent to parents of students in Class A and the mid-year survey sent to parents of students in Class B elicited a wide variety of responses. The questions on both surveys were open-ended and the surveys were completed anonymously giving parents more opportunity to speak freely regarding the educational program and communication strategies utilized by the teacher/researchers. All comments were

analyzed in their narrative form and the researchers looked for patterns and responses that would assist the teacher in reflecting on current practices in the classroom. Observed patterns in both classes included a general satisfaction with the instructional program, willingness on the part of parents to play an active role in the educational process and an appreciation of the varied and many formal and informal communication opportunities offered. Getting feedback allowed for changes in classroom practices when needed. Some comments from the surveys pertained to district and school policy issues such as homework, student absence due to family vacations, grading scale, and classroom placement for the next school year. Parents gave opinions on these issues enabling the teacher researchers to discuss the policies with administrators. This added another level to the reflective process of determining the best instructional practices for all students.

The K-1 class newsletter was distributed to all parents of students in Class A via the Friday folder and was also posted on the district web page. It was also posted on the Family Education Network (FEN). Informal data were collected from written comments made by parents on the Friday folder parent/teacher comment form. Comments were positive in nature and the newsletter appeared to serve as an informational tool to assist parents and families of students in the understanding of class activities.

Progress/behavior mini-reports for students in Class B were sent home three times during the action research project. Each time, all reports were returned signed by parents. Thirteen of the returned reports included parent comments. There were nine positive comments regarding student behavior and academic progress, all expressing pride in the students' accomplishments. Two questions were asked regarding ways parents could help bring grades up. Two requests were made for further teacher assistance in the

classroom. One parent/teacher conference was scheduled due to information in the report pertaining to student progress in academics. Comments made on these mini-reports were made by nine out of the 22 parents in Class B. This is a smaller portion than those who responded on the weekly signature sheet. This report provided parents with more detailed, overall student progress including averages and letter-grade standing at the time of the report. This tool provided concrete information for parents, but elicited less response.

Research supports the use of a variety of formal communication tools as a way to strengthen partnerships between parents and teachers. However, informal communication opportunities in a family-friendly school environment can be just as enlightening for parents and educators. The teacher researchers took advantage of opportunities to speak with parents on a more casual basis. These opportunities occurred when parents were in the building for PTA activities, when parents stopped in before or after school, or when parents came in to pick up homework for absentee students. Many parents used this time to make inquiries regarding student progress or to convey questions or concerns to the teachers. Some of these impromptu conferences led to further assistance for a child in a particular curricular area, referrals for social work support for students experiencing personal difficulties that were unknown to the teacher, and the sharing of family experiences supportive of activities and experiences in the classroom. Some parents were willing to share personal situations to give the teacher a better understanding of their children.

Parent/Child/Teacher Learning Activities

The teachers of both classes implemented parent/child/teacher reading and writing activities for the purpose of involving parents in the learning process. These activities provided opportunities for parents who could not be involved in the classroom to be directly involved with their children in an engaging activity at home. Lessons were conducted in the classroom, which directly related to and extended the reading and writing at home.

Monthly parent/child homework activities in Class A involved student selected activities to be completed each week with parent support. Parents and students responded individually on a monthly journal page that was returned to the teacher on the last day of each month. An analysis of the comments on these journal pages demonstrates student/ parent collaboration in support of student learning outside of the classroom.

This reading/writing activity in Class B spanned a three-week period during which students read aloud to an adult reading partner at home, worked with that reading partner to choose two vocabulary words from each chapter with his or her reading partner, and wrote a reflective paragraph for each chapter. At the conclusion of the activity, a parent reflection survey was sent home as a communication tool to help the teacher evaluate the activity as a way to get parents involved and as a way to help communicate reading progress of the students. The questions were open-ended and surveys were anonymous.

Of the 22 reflective surveys sent home, 13 parents responded. Parents were asked to comment on benefits of the activity for themselves and for their children, insights they

had gained about reading abilities of their children, and problems encountered with the activity.

Analysis of the data from these surveys showed that all 13 of the parents who responded felt that they had benefited from being actively involved in the learning process. Benefits cited were: spending time with their children, enjoying a good book and discussion, having fun reading and sharing the excitement of the story, and being able to witness their children's oral reading fluency and comprehension skills through an enjoyable activity. Of the 13 respondents, three felt that their students were reading more fluently than at the beginning of the year, one acknowledged a need to help her child with fluency by setting aside more time to read aloud at home, and two requested more activities like this to give students a reason to read outside of the school day. Of the 13 respondents, 4 expressed finding the time for the reading and writing as the negative part of the activity. Working and other family activities were cited as reasons for difficulty in this area.

In-school parent/adult volunteer opportunities

Class A

Parents of students in Class A were given an average of 32 in-class volunteer opportunities each month during the intervention period. The on-going parent/adult activities were supportive of the instructional program, developed as integral parts of the student day, and allowed for appropriate adult/student interactions to take place within a structured format. A total of 22 parents volunteered for at least one of the in-class opportunities per month, with many parents volunteering for two or three activities per month. The teacher researcher of Class A designed and distributed a monthly volunteer

schedule based upon the information provided in the Adult volunteer survey. Throughout the intervention, parent availability often changed due to family responsibilities or work schedules. In matters of rescheduling, parents still expressed a desire to volunteer, and these changes were honored by the teacher researcher whenever possible. All volunteers were given a list of names and phone numbers of other parents/adults available for the same time period. Many volunteers took responsibility for a change in schedule by trading with someone. Further analysis of parent comments expressed formally on the Friday folder comment form and informally through conversation indicated parent satisfaction with in-school volunteer opportunities. Parents recognized and expressed an appreciation and understanding of the importance of these activities in support of student learning.

Class B

During the intervention period, parents of students in Class B were given the opportunity to be involved in the classroom as a part of the parent/child/teacher learning activity previously described. Parents were invited into the classroom to celebrate the completion of an enjoyable reading/writing experience. A luncheon was held which required volunteers to contribute time and food. Invitations were sent out one week before the luncheon and included requests by the teacher for volunteers.

Of the 22 invitations sent home, 22 parents responded. Thirteen of the 22 parents volunteered to bring food, cook food, help set up, or help clean up. Two parents could not attend the luncheon, but volunteered to send donations. A total of 20 parents and grandparents attended the luncheon. Six parents took time off from work to attend, three

came on their lunch hour, nine were full-time homemakers who were available during the entire school day, and two were grandparents of students.

Parents used this opportunity to communicate with teacher, students, and other parents. They mentioned the need for more celebration of student accomplishments and said they enjoyed the opportunity to be truly involved with their children in a way that positively impacted them academically, and allowed parents to gain insight into their abilities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based upon data collected throughout the intervention period, the teacher researchers have concluded that when teachers reach out to parents, parents will respond. Parents, when provided with a variety of involvement opportunities that meet personal needs and schedules, will actively support student learning. The opportunities provided must be varied in structure and incorporate the possibility for involvement by all parents. It is advantageous that activities are recognized by parents/adults to be meaningful and curriculum based. When communicating to increase parent involvement, teachers must give careful consideration to the existence of parents' preconceived perceptions of school, provide clear and precise information in relation to volunteer expectations and responsibilities, and understand that family obligations and constraints may impact the level of parent/adult involvement in student learning.

Interventions appeared to have helped parents understand their child as a learner. Formal and informal two-way communication strategies should be used as a bridge between parents and teachers on a consistent basis. Teachers must have a clear understanding of purpose in the development of two-way communication tools. Teachers

must have time to create such tools, opportunity for analysis of collected data, and must demonstrate a willingness to develop an action plan in an attempt to positively affect parent involvement.

Parent/child/teacher learning activities appeared to provide parents, children, and teachers opportunities for meaningful, academically based interactions at home and school. Parents demonstrated an eagerness to support the student learning process at home by actively engaging in specifically designed activities. It appeared to the teacher researchers that students benefited from parent involvement in the home/school activities as demonstrated by their enthusiasm to complete homework assignments and their willingness to share completed results in class. The teacher researchers concluded the home/school activities served as an effective two-way communication tool to strengthen parent involvement in student learning.

Teacher created in-school volunteer opportunities presented parents with definite roles and responsibilities. The researchers conclude that parents demonstrated an enthusiasm for in-school volunteer experiences when provided with multiple options of activities and flexibility in scheduled times. Two-way communication strategies that promote in-school volunteer opportunities strengthened parents' knowledge and encouraged parent involvement in student learning.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARENT SURVEY

1. If you have had the opportunity to volunteer at Butterfield School during the 1998-99 school year please list the activities in which you have participated.

2. What benefits does your child experience as a result of your involvement in his/her educational process?

3. In what ways has your involvement helped to improve ALL student learning at Butterfield School?

4. Explain how your involvement helps to encourage a positive learning atmosphere at Butterfield School.

5. How do you support student learning outside of the classroom?

6. What benefits have YOU received as a result of your involvement (in or outside of the classroom) in student learning?

APPENDIX B

PARENT/TEACHER COLLABORATION
Educator's Survey

1. Do you utilize parental assistance in your present instructional setting?

2. If yes, in what capacities?

3. If you do not use parental assistance in your present instructional setting, why not?

4. In what capacity would you be willing to utilize parental assistance in your present instructional setting?

5. Do you view parent involvement in the educational setting as beneficial to student learning? Please explain your answer.

APPENDIX C

Student Survey

1. Do you like having adult volunteers in our classroom?

2. How would you feel if your parent(s) could come in to volunteer?

3. How does an adult volunteer help you to be a better learner?

Date:_____ Pre Post

APPENDIX D

Student Survey

1. Do you like having adult volunteers in our classroom?

2. How would you feel if your parent(s) could come in to volunteer?

3. How does an adult volunteer help you to be a better learner?

Date:_____ Pre Post

APPENDIX E

Parent Signature & Comments

Teacher Comments & Date

APPENDIX F

K-1 Cluster News

http://www.district

K-1 Cluster Curriculum Night

Tues., Mar. 23
7-8 PM
in the APR

You can learn many things from children. How much patience you have, for instance.
-- Franklin P. Adams

Special Topics We're Studying...
- *Completion of the Sun, Moon & Stars.
- *All students utilizing the "100's Chart" as a learning tool in a variety of ways.
- *Students learning about money and the value of pennies, nickels and dimes.
- *Our new science topic is titled "Science in a Toy Box". Students explore pushes & pulls and how things move.

K-1 Fieldtrip to the Theatre
- Our fieldtrip to the Paramount Theatre in Aurora to see "Corduroy" is scheduled for Fri., March 26. The performance begins at 10 AM.
- Have a big breakfast, there won't be time for a snack! All students are to bring a sack lunch and bring a drink to have at school upon our return!
- Remember to dress appropriately for the theatre!

Spring Break: March 27-April 4 No School

Books That Fill the Bill!
- The Moon Book by Gail Gibbons
- Corduroy by Don Freeman
- What's Inside Toys by Dorling Kindersly
- Things That Go! by Judith Conaway
- Nursery Rhymes

Just a Reminder
*March homework extension due to the lack of opportunities to view the moon!
*End of the 3rd quarter is April 9. Please return your child's Skills Book if you have it.
*1st grade report cards will be sent home on April 16.
*Window replacement will take place at BF during Spring Break. Custodians will also be busy with "Spring Cleaning".
*The Fun Fair was stupendous!!

Ideas for Spring Break!
-The Children's Museum in Wheaton- activities with magnets, water tables, construction center, and dress-up.
-The Children's Museum at Navy Pier- see the Dr. Seuss exhibit.
-The Field Museum of Natural History-visit the Native American, Inuit, and Totem Pole exhibits.
-Brookfield Zoo-animals of the Zones & the Everglades (coming up soon!
-Adler Planetarium

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APPENDIX G

Parent Community Survey-1999

As you know, our entire K-1 Cluster team has worked hard to initiate and implement an instructional program that best meets the needs of our students. The purpose of this opinion survey is to gather information from you about how you think we are doing in this endeavor.

Listed below are statements. Please read each statement and then circle the number which best represents your reaction to the statement. Circling a "5" means that you strongly agree with the statement. Circling a "1" means that you strongly disagree with the statement. The numbers "2", "3", and "4" represent different levels of agreement between the strong levels.

Also, please take time to answer the questions included with this survey. Your additional comments and any further questions will assist in the continued development of this multi-age program.

Please return this by Friday

1. The K-1 Cluster helps my child learn as much as possible. 1-------2-------3-------4-------5
Comments:

2. The K-1 Cluster helps my child learn to work well in a group setting. 1-------2-------3-------4-------5
Comments:

3. The K-1 Cluster helps my child develop a strong positive self image. 1-------2-------3-------4-------5
Comments:

4. My child receives adequate individual attention in the K-1 Cluster. 1-------2-------3-------4-------5
Comments:

5. I feel that adequate communication exists to keep me informed about my child's academic progress. 1-------2-------3-------4-------5
Comments:

6. The atmosphere or learning climate in the K-1 Cluster is positive. 1-------2-------3-------4-------5
Comments:

7. I support the K-1 Cluster as a part of the instructional program at Butterfield School. 1-------2-------3-------4-------5
Comments:

8. Discipline is not a serious problem in the K-1 Cluster. 1-------2-------3-------4-------5
Comments:

9. The K-1 Cluster has a positive image in the community. 1-------2-------3-------4-------5
Comments:

10. My child shares what he/she has learned at school. 1-------2-------3-------4-------5
Comments:

K-1 Cluster Survey

1. What do you like about the K-1 Cluster?

2. Is the K-1 Cluster performing as described in the parent meetings?

3. What would you like to see more of in the K-1 Cluster program?

4. Were the thematic units (ie: Fall Harvest, Dr. Seuss, Alaska) interesting to your child? Any suggestions?

5. How has the K-1 Cluster benefited your child?

APPENDIX H

I have looked at and discussed with my child all papers included in his her Tuesday take-home folder.

Parent Signature:_____ **Parent Signature:**_____

Date:_____ **Date:**_____

Comments:_____ **Comments:**_____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Parent Signature:_____ **Parent Signature:**_____

Date:_____ **Date:**_____

Comments:_____ **Comments:**_____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Parent Signature:_____ **Parent Signature:**_____

Date:_____ **Date:**_____

Comments:_____ **Comments:**_____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Parent Signature:_____ **Parent Signature:**_____

Date:_____ **Date:**_____

Comments:_____ **Comments:**_____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

****Any papers with a grade of D or E must be signed by a parent or guardian, corrected by the student, and returned by Friday .**

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APPENDIX I

Mini-Reports

Behavior Report

Name _____ Date _____

Behavior	Poor	Fair	Good
Follows Class Rules			
Follows Directions			
Uses Time Wisely			
Cooperates			
Attitude			

Comments: _____

_____

Teacher _____ Parent _____
sign and return

Progress Report

Name _____ Date _____

Subject	Poor	Fair	Good
Language Arts			
Math			
Science			
Social Studies			

Comments: _____

_____

Teacher _____ Parent _____
sign and return

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APPENDIX J

Dear Parents,

As we move forward into the second half of the school year, I find it helpful to take some time to reflect on what we have accomplished so far. I have looked at each child's progress individually and have seen remarkable gains since September.

The children are showing a greater sense of responsibility and pride in their work. They have accepted challenges (occasionally with a groan or two) both academically and socially. As curriculum becomes more difficult, most of the boys and girls have come to expect more of themselves.

I would like to ask that you also take some time to reflect with your child on the year so far. Please take a few moments to consider the following questions.

1. Is your child enjoying 4th grade?

2. What does your child feel is the greatest challenge of 4th grade?

3. What activity or activities has your child indicated was most exciting?

4. Do you think our Tuesday take-home folder process is working well for you? If not, how could it be improved?

5. The district recommends that 4th graders have approximately 45-60 minutes of homework three to four times per week. Is that approximately what is occurring with your child?

6. Please share concerns or comments on any part of your child's school day.

I thank you in advance for taking the time to join me in reflection. I hope that this time we spend will make the rest of the year even better for your child. Please return this sheet with your comments as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

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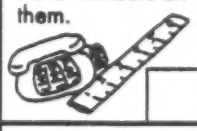
APPENDIX K

Name _____ Month: January

Choose at least 3 activities to complete each week. Check the box in the lower right corner of each calendar square as your child completes the activity. Turn in the calendar and the response journal on the last school day of January.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Write one thing you would like to do better this year. Write what you can do to reach that goal.	Trace and cut out the shape of your foot. Find three things that are about the same length.	Martin Luther King, Jr., dreamed of peace in the world. What is your dream for the world?	Talk about wind. How do you know the wind is blowing when you can't see it?	Write the alphabet in capital letters. Use your best handwriting
Divide some uncooked macaroni into groups of 10. How many tens and ones do you have?	Use dimes and pennies to show 14¢. Then show 32¢, 68¢, and 89¢.	Fold and cut a white paper circle to make a snowflake.	Write your name as neatly as you can with a pen, pencil, crayon, marker, or piece of chalk.	List five words that rhyme with *snow*.
Write as many addition facts as you can that have your age as the sum.	Make a bird feeder. Cover a pine cone with peanut butter. Roll it in birdseed. Hang it on a branch.	List at least five things that use electricity.	Find two objects that are alike in at least two ways.	Use these winter words to write a story or poem *snow, snowman, ski, mittens* and a
Close your eyes. Try to identify objects by using senses other than sight.	List ten things in your home that have numbers on them. 	Read a story. Tell someone what happened at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end.	Look at a January calendar. How many Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays are there?	Count to 50 by twos.
Help your family write a grocery list. Then go shopping together.	Look up your last name in a phone book. Count how many times your last name is listed.	Name five words that have a short *o* sound (as in *olive*).	Practice dribbling a basketball.	Have a family talent night. Read, dance, a poem, or a hobby

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Name _____

Response Journal

Help your child complete this page. Turn in this journal along with the calendar on the last school day of January.

Student

1. My favorite activity was _____.

   I liked it because _____

   _____.

2. One activity I needed help with was _____

   _____.

3. I learned _____

   _____.

Parent

1. I learned _____.

2. The activity I most enjoyed doing with my child was _____

   _____

3. The activity I helped my child with most was _____

   _____

Parent's Signature _____

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APPENDIX L

Dear Parents,

Beginning on Tues. our class will begin a unit based on the novel Stone Fox by John Reynolds Gardiner. There are many exciting activities associated with this unit which explores the themes of pets, friendship, and families.

In order to enhance the family portion of the unit and to help students improve both reading fluency and comprehension through family discussion, your child will be asked to read chapters 2 through 10 aloud at home. In order for this to be a successful reading experience for your child, I am asking for your help.

Please see that your child reads each assigned chapter aloud to a parent. There will never be more than 1 chapter assigned per night and the chapters are short (7-10 pages). Along with the book , your child will also bring home a Reading Log to be filled in after the read-aloud is completed. We will do Chapter 1 together in class so that the children understand the assignment and you can see an example of what is expected. Also, please help your child to choose 2 vocabulary words from each chapter for class activities the next day. Last, please sign your child's log each night when the assignment is completed.

I understand that this will be a nightly assignment to add to everyone's hectic schedules. However, time spent reading and discussing together can only benefit both you and your child and give your child an opportunity to share his or her reading progress and responses to the book.

I thank you in advance for your support. Please make sure your child brings his or her book and log back to school each day and don't hesitate to contact me with any questions you have.

Sincerely,

Please sign and return this portion so I know that you are aware of this family reading experience.

Parent Signature_____

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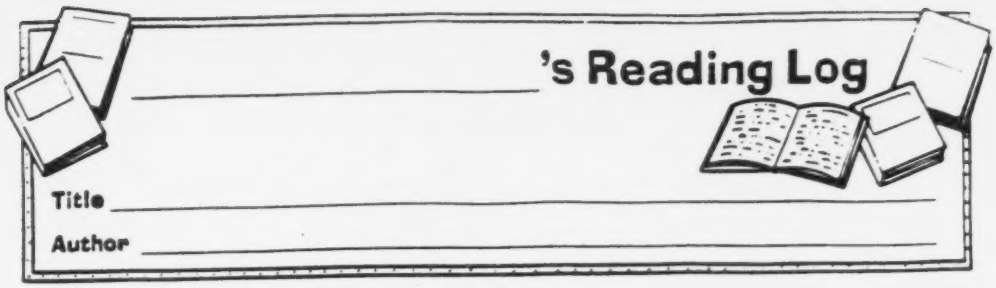

_____'s Reading Log

Title _____

Author _____

Date Pages Vocabulary	Summary/Feelings

Date Pages Vocabulary	Summary/Feelings

	Parent Reflection

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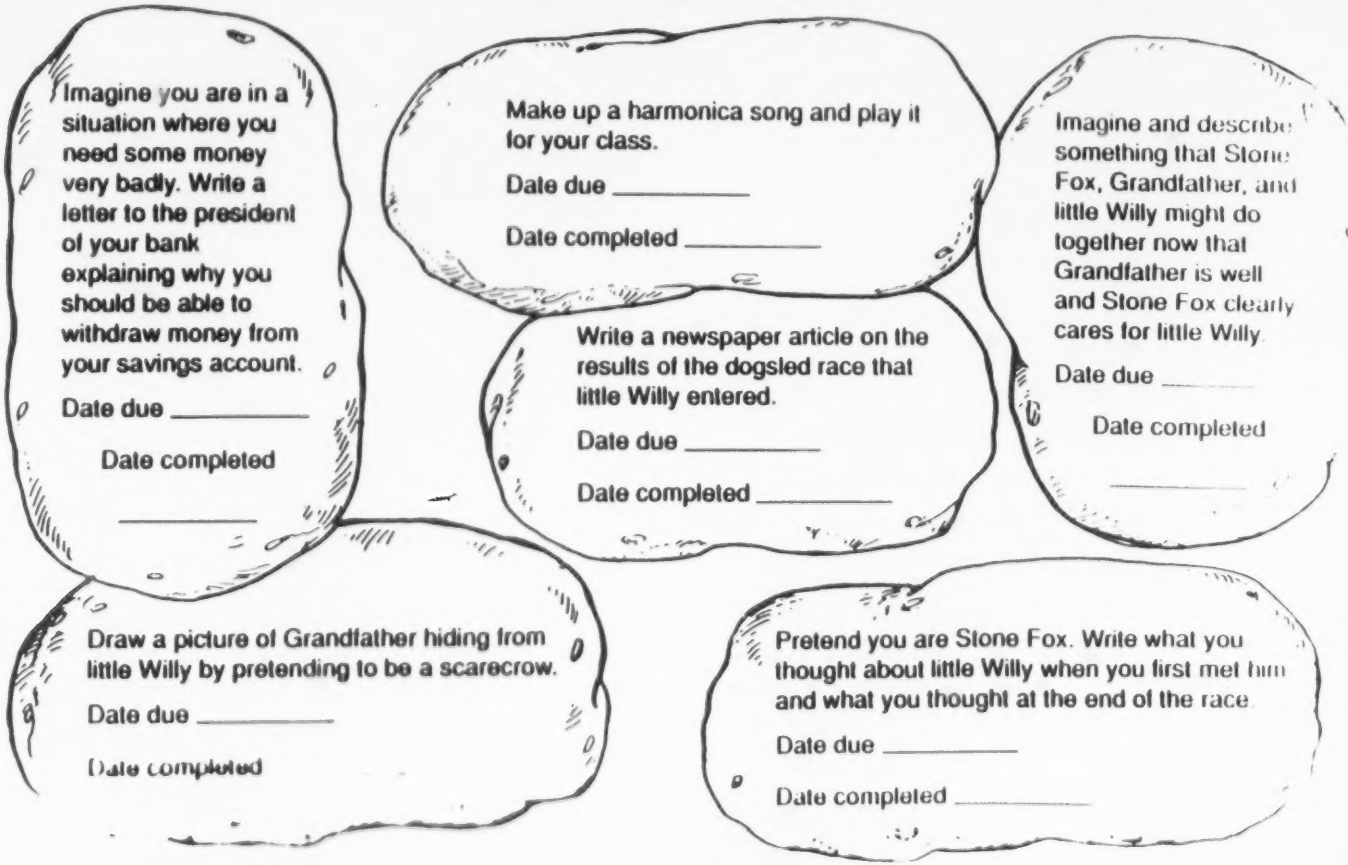
Name _____ Critical ...

You Choose

Choose two projects. Color their potatoes. Write the due dates for each project and the dates you complete them.


Imagine you are in a situation where you need some money very badly. Write a letter to the president of your bank explaining why you should be able to withdraw money from your savings account.
Date due _____
Date completed _____
Make up a harmonica song and play it for your class.
Date due _____
Date completed _____
Write a newspaper article on the results of the dogsled race that little Willy entered.
Date due _____
Date completed _____
Imagine and describe something that Stone Fox, Grandfather, and little Willy might do together now that Grandfather is well and Stone Fox clearly cares for little Willy.
Date due _____
Date completed _____
Draw a picture of Grandfather hiding from little Willy by pretending to be a scarecrow.
Date due _____
Date completed
Pretend you are Stone Fox. Write what you thought about little Willy when you first met him and what you thought at the end of the race.
Date due _____
Date completed _____

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Dear Parents/Reading partners,

I would like to thank you for your support of this home/school literature experience for your child. As we close this unit, I would like to ask you to reflect on this experience as it pertained to you and your child. The children and I will also be reflecting on how the in-school activities served as an extension to help them gain more meaning from the story.

Your input is extremely valuable as a way for me to evaluate the unit and to measure its appropriateness as an instructional tool. Please take a few moments to respond to the survey I have attached. Again, thank you for your support and for all your kind words of encouragement throughout this unit.

Sincerely,

PARENT REFLECTION

STONE FOX LITERATURE EXPERIENCE

1. What benefits did you, as your child's reading partner, receive as a result of this home/school literature experience?

2. Describe any insights you gained about your child's reading abilities.

3. What do you feel were the benefits of this experience for your child?

4. Describe any problems you or your child encountered with this literature experience.

5. Please share any other comments or concerns you may have about this experience.

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STUDENT REFLECTION

STONE FOX LITERATURE EXPERIENCE

1. What was the best thing about reading STONE FOX at home with a partner?

2. Describe what event in the story you and your partner talked about the most.

3. How did our activities at school help you to better understand the story?

4. What was the hardest part of reading STONE FOX at home to a partner?

5. Tell me anything else you would like to share about this reading experience.

APPENDIX M

Questions to Ask Children When They Are Reading With You

Roberta L. Berglund
Reading/Language Arts Coordinator

Before Reading
What do you think this story will be about?
What makes you think so?
Does this remind you of anything else you have read?

During Reading
Does that make sense? Why?
Does the picture help you remember what happened?
What do you think will happen next? What makes you think so?

After Reading
Can you tell me the story?
What part did you like best? Can you read a bit of that for me?
Can you find a funny part, sad part, etc. and read (show) it to me?
What else would you like to read? Why?

When A Child Is Having Trouble With a Word...Try Saying:
Try that sentence again.
Does that word sound right?
Does that word look right?
Does that match what you said?
What would you expect to see at the (beginning, middle, end) of that word?
Do you know any parts of the word?
Do you know other words with the same parts in the same places?
If these ideas don't help, tell the child the word.

When a Child Asks..."How do you spell.....?" Try Saying:
What do you hear?
What do you think?
How do you think it starts? What do you hear next?
For irregular words (said, they, etc.), tell the child how to spell it or provide help with the hard parts.

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APPENDIX N

Adult Volunteers

Dear Parents & Guardians,

The old proverb, "Many hands make light work", is still ever so true today! Throughout the year there are a number of ways that we could use the help of interested volunteers. Volunteer opportunities include reading 1:1 with students (usually in the morning) and assisting during Centers time or Reader's Workshop (usually in the afternoon). Specific information and a description of responsibilities pertaining to each activity is also enclosed. There is also work that can be done at home such as collating materials or cutting out items for student projects or Center activities. If you are interested in lending a bit of your time and help, please return the bottom portion to us by Friday We will be contacting you to let you know how you can best help out in our classes. Thank you!

Sincerely,

_____

*Name_____

*I can help out on these days_____

*I can help out these mornings only_____

*I can help out these afternoons only_____

*I am willing to work in ANY K-1 Cluster room_____

*I am willing to assist at home_____

*The best time to call me is_____

APPENDIX O

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1 No school	2 ○ P.1	3 ✱ P.2 ○ P.4 (1:15-1:50) → P.3	4 ✱ P.5 → P.6	5 ✱ P.7 ○ P.8	6
7	8 ✱ P.9 ○ P.10 ○ P.11	9 ○ P.12 ○ P.1	10 ✱ P.13 → P.4	11 ✱ P.4 ○ P.4 (1:15-1:50) → P.14	12 ✱ P.15	13
14	15 ✱ P.4 ○ P.16	16 ○ P.4 ○ P.17	17 ✱ P.14 → P.18	18 ✱ P.5 → P.11	19 ✱ P.7 ○ P.13 ○ P.9	20
21	22 ✱ P.2 ○ P.4 ○ P.10	23 ○ P.19 ○ P.12	24 ✱ P.4 → P.1	25 ✱ P.13 → P.14	26 ○ P.8	27
28	29 NO School →	30 →	31 →			

✱ One-on-One parent reader
AM (M, W, Th, F) 8:40-?
→ Readers' Workshop
PM (W, Th) 2:15-3:05
○ Centers: PM (M, T, F) 2:30-3:10

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APPENDIX P

Information for K-1 Cluster Volunteers

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PARENT READERS

This activity is designed to provide the opportunity for children to read 1:1 with an adult. It is generally scheduled as a morning activity and can continue alongside the existing classroom routine. Students will self select a book to read and practice with the volunteer. The student will then take the book home in a plastic bag to share with family members. Students are expected to obtain a parent/adult signature on a Home Reading Log sheet indicating the book was read and that someone listened to the child read. The student name, book title, and date are also recorded in a notebook that remains at school just in case we need the information. There are two baskets of books, one for the kindergarten students and the other for the 1st grade students with a variety of titles, topics, and reading levels available in each basket. Returned books also need to be checked in to insure the possibility for other students to enjoy reading them. A list of possible questions to ask and suggested comments to make in the support of our young readers is also available. Both students and adults enjoy this 1:1 reading experience.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR READER'S WORKSHOP

Reader's Workshop is an opportunity for students to read self-selected books independently, conference with a teacher about the selection, reread the book to fellow students, and then to expand the reading experience through an extended activity. The books used during Reader's Workshop are leveled with colored stickers to help students in the selection process. The books are in book tubs labeled Early, Transitional, and Fluent for each of the developmental reading stages. Adult volunteers provide another set of ears to listen to student readers, another set of hands to assist students in the independent activities, and another set of eyes to also enjoy the process young readers experience in the quest to become a successful reader. Reader's Workshop is generally scheduled for the afternoon for a 30-45 minute block of time.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR CENTER TIME

Center activities are designed to provide students with the opportunity to practice independent work skills in a small group setting. Center experiences are generally coordinated with a thematic unit of study and are reflective of appropriate skills and/or strategies previously introduced in class. Center activities challenge students to think creatively and critically, problem solve for appropriate solutions, and to apply previous knowledge to new learning experiences. At the conclusion of Center time students process the experience together in a large group setting with each student having a chance to share something he or she has learned. Each Center requires an adult facilitator to support a small group of students (6-8) during this independent work time. It is a very "busy" time of our school day with much discussion and interaction among students and adults. Center time is usually scheduled in the afternoon for 45-60 minutes.

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APPENDIX Q

Dear Reading Partner,

On Tues. you are invited to "Baked Potato Luncheon" to help celebrate our family reading experience of Stone Fox. The lunch will be held in Room from 12:00 to 12:40 p.m.

Please let us know if you can attend so that we know how many potatoes to prepare. We will also have fruit salad, juice, and dessert. We hope you can come.

Sincerely,

I will attend_____
I will not attend_____

I can contribute to the luncheon by donating:
Potato toppings_____
what kind?_____

Dessert_____
I can bake some of the potatoes at home and bring them hot to school at 12:00_____
(will provide potatoes and send them home with your child on Monday)